5 Ways to Persuade with Character (Ethos)

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[](http://www.georgeambler.com/5-ways-persuade-character-ethos/character-ethos/)

When Nelson Mandela spoke people listened. When Winston Churchill spoke people listened. When Warren Buffet speaks people listen. When Jeff Bezos speaks people listen. When leaders speak people listen. When you speak do people listen? Do you have the character and credibility to persuade others with your message? Ethos refers to an audience’s perception of the character, authority and credibility of the speaker. Ethos concerns itself with answering the questions of “What do you know about this topic?” and “Why should I trust you?” as asked by the audience.

***Character is based on the audience perception of who you are and how you come across.***

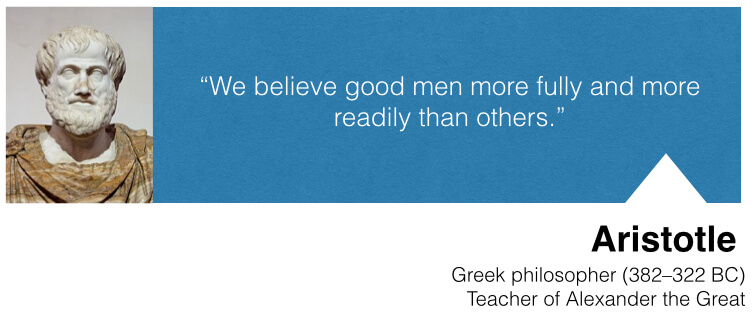
Strong character and credibility is necessary to get the attention and respect of an audience. If you have low ethos an audience will not be persuaded by your message. Character is based on the audience perception of *who you are* and *how you come across*.

* **Who you are?** This aspect of ethos relates to the your goodwill, trustworthiness and credibility.
* **How you come across?** The extrinsic characteristics of ethos relates to the speaker’s similarity, practical wisdom, language and style.

Before we explore each of these elements let’s discuss the role and importance of*character* in persuading others.

What Do We Mean by Character?

Character answers the question *why should anyone believe what you’re saying?”*

Character is central to persuading using ethos. Good moral character provides the foundation on which a speaker gains the right to communicate and share their message.[](http://www.georgeambler.com/5-ways-persuade-character-ethos/aristotle-good-men-quote/)

Character is the authentic expression of who you are as a human. To be an authentic expression it needs to include your strengths, weakness and flaws. It shows you as a real person, a person of integrity and good morals, subject to the same problems and pressures as others. Character also means that you are a person who lives by a set of values. Authenticity, integrity and a good moral character provides the basis for trust.

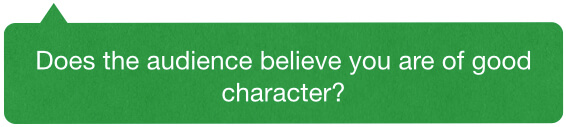
What an Audience Looks for to Establish Character

An audience makes many judgments about a speaker based on assumptions as to who you are and if you can be trusted. To establish a strong ethos and show character you need to answer the following five questions:

1. Does the audience believe you are of good character?
2. Does the audience believe you can be trusted?
3. Does the audience believe you’re an authority on the topic?
4. Does the audience see you as similar to them?
5. Does your language and communication style resonate with your audience?

Most of the above questions about a speaker are answered by the audience even before the speaker gets to share their message. Your message may have the best ideas, facts, evidence and a compelling story. But if your audience doesn’t think you’re credible you’ll fail to persuade them with your message. Let’s explore each of these elements of ethos and how they can be strengthened.

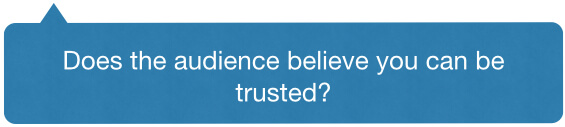
1. Goodwill



One of the elements of ethos identified by Aristotle is the goodwill of the speaker towards the audience. This concerns the speaker’s intent and motivation. You need to show your audience that your intention and motivation is to be useful, to help educate, to inspire, to inform and to entertain. These motivations are positive and demonstrates your goodwill towards the audience. Goodwill is strengthened when you’re able to demonstrate your motivation, intention and a commitment to a set of values:

* One of the most powerful ways of demonstrating goodwill is through empathy. Your ability to empathise with the audience, their challenges, frustrations and difficulties creates goodwill. The act of empathy demonstrates that you understand the audience, their state of mind and emotional reactions. This opens the way for your message to be positively received.
* State your values and tell stories of how you use them to guide your behaviour. Give practical example of how you live your values. This helps to show that you are of good character.
* Show how your interests are align with their interests. If you’re able to help the audience feel that their interest are aligned with yours they will be more open and accepting of your message.

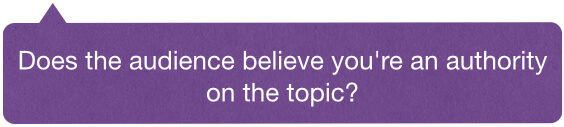
2. Trustworthiness



A trustworthy person is someone in whom you can place your trust. An audience is more likely to be persuaded by someone they trust. Speakers are considered trustworthy when the audience believes the speaker is presenting accurate information in an objective manner. Expertise is *not* trust! Just because you are considered an expert it does not mean people will trust you. You can have great expertise, but if you’re not perceived as trustworthy you’ll find difficulty in persuading your audience. Some of the ways that you can go about improving your trustworthiness are as follows:

* Trust is improved when your words and actions are for the benefit of others. Speak and act for the greater good.
* People trust when there is mutual respect for one another. Alway be respectful of others.
* Honesty is central to being trustworthy. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Honesty is important to building trust with an audience.
* Admit what you don’t know. If you don’t know the answer to a question say so.
* Do what you say you will do. Keep your commitments and promises. If you show you’re reliable people will learn to trust you.
* People who are trustworthy do not only have the expertise, they also have the skills and experience necessary to get results.
* Be fair and unbiased presenting multiple perspectives on the topic. Trustworthiness is enhanced when you present information from multiple perspectives, in an objective and balanced way.
* Always cite credible sources when providing data and information.

3. Credibility



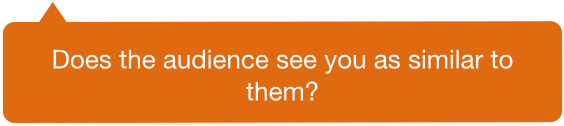
We are more open to persuasion by people we view as credible. Credibility consists of two core components *trustworthiness* and *expertise*. We discussed trustworthiness above. Expertise is about what you know about your topic. The audience perception of your expertise is shaped by many factors:

* Your education, certification and knowledge relating to the topic.
* Your track record, skills and achievements relating to the topic.
* Your years of experience and reputation relating to the topic.
* Recognition received from institutions and peers relating to the topic.

Your credibility depends on your expertise and how this is communicated to the audience. These factors only contribute to improving your ethos if they’re communicated to the audience. So you must take charge of communicate your expertise, experience and knowledge to your audience. Some of the ways you can improve how the audience perceives your credibility are as follows:

* Ensure your audience knows about your expertise and experience. You many need to remind the audience of your knowledge, skills, expertise and experience.
* Speak with confidence, making eye contact. If you want people to believe you, you must show that you believe yourself. Speak confidently as though you cannot be challenged.
* Prepare well and know what you’re talking about.
* Share your biography before you present to a new audience.
* Show practical wisdom. Practical wisdom refers to your ability to determine what’s worth doing together with the ability to get it done. It’s about showing that you’re sensible as well as knowledgeable. Show how your practical experience has benefited others.

4. Similarity

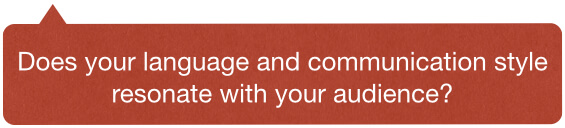


We are more easily persuaded by those who are like us. If you’re perceived similar to your audience they will be more open and receptive to your ideas. If you share some of the same characteristics as your audience you’re off to a good start! If you don’t there are a number of things that you can do to *adapt* and thereby increase your influence. The idea is to identify common traits that you share with your audience. By identifying and communicating traits that show you similar to your audience you increase the audience’s openness to your message. There are a number of traits you can use to show that you’re similar to your audience to boost your ethos. You can use any of the following traits to show how you’re similarity to your audience:

* **Demographic Similarities**. Age, culture, ethnicity, race, gender, country of birth. For example a female audience will be more receptive to and more easily identify with a female speaker and their experiences.
* **Professional Similarities** Profession, organisations, industry, career history or common challenges. For example an audience within a specific industry would be more open to someone who has had experience working in the same industry.
* **Personal Similarities** Personality, extrovert, introvert, personal motivations, challenges and difficulties. An audience will be more open to someone who has experienced similar challenges and difficulties.

These are some of the traits you can use to show how you’re similar to your audience. You can also adapt your language, presentation style and your dress to match the audience. With careful observation of your audience you’ll be able to identify other areas where you can show how you’re similar to your audience. The key message is that you need to adapt to your audience in ways that make you seem similar to them.

5. Language and Style



The ethos of a speaker is improved by adopting a language and style appropriate to the audience. This means using language, words and jargon that resonates with your audience. Where possible seek to use the same language that your audience would use to describe the concepts you’re presenting.

* Use an appropriate level of vocabulary.
* Use definitions to add clarity.
* Use facts, data and statistics to support your argument.
* Avoid jargon and acronyms not familiar to your audience.
* Use vivid and concrete language.
* Use stories and example to illustrate your points.
* Show enthusiasm and passion for your topic.